

TITLE OF THE INVENTION
VIDEOPHONE DEVICE AND DATA TRANSMITTING/RECEIVING
METHOD APPLIED THERETO

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 This application is based upon and claims the
benefit of priority from prior Japanese Patent
Application No. 2003-096297, filed March 31, 2003,
the entire contents of which are incorporated herein
by reference.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a videophone
device and a data transmitting/receiving method applied
thereto.

15 2. Description of the Related Art

A conventional videophone device can transmit
an image and voice to a videophone device of a party
at the other end of a communication link, through
a communication network. Furthermore, a videophone
20 system is disclosed (in, e.g., Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI
Publication No. 2002-165193), which can provide
attendant information in addition to an image and
voice. This video phone system includes an information
providing device and a telephone switching system which
25 are connected together. The information providing
device detects a keyword from voice data exchanged
between the videophone devices, selects from a storage

section, attendant information associated with the detected keyword, and makes the videophone devices display the attendant information. As the attendant information, advertisement information or service information is provided. The advertisement information is information for advertising an enterprise or a store (advertiser) which ties up with the system. As the service information, various kinds of information considered to be useful to the user (such as a weather forecast and a road map) is provided.

In such a manner, in the above conventional video phone device, attendant information is displayed in addition to transmission of an image and voice. However, in the videophone system, the videophone device can merely display attendant information, which is not necessarily required for conversation since the videophone device is provided on the premise that only an image and voice can be used by the user. Thus, such a feature is not useful. To be more specific, even if the attendant information is displayed, the user cannot know from the attendant information the content of the speech of the party of the other end. That is, the conventional videophone device and video phone system do not a technique which also enables a deaf person to communicate with a party of the other end of a communication link by using the videophone device.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of the present is to provide a videophone device which can handle a character string expressing the content of a user's speech, in addition
5 to an image and voice, and data transmitting/receiving method of the videophone device.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a videophone device for transmitting/receiving an image and voice to/from
10 another device through a network, comprises a voice input unit configured to input voice data, an image input unit configured to input image data, a text data generating unit configured to generate text data while at least one of the image data and the voice data
15 is being input, a synthesizing unit configured to synthesize the voice data, the image data and the text data to obtain data, and a communication unit configured to transmit the data obtained by the synthesizing unit.

20 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of the structure of a video phone system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the structure of each
25 of videophone devices 12 and 14 in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a view for showing transmission of data

from the videophone device 12 to the videophone device 14 in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a flowchart for explaining the operation of the videophone device 12 on the transmitting side in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a view for showing a relationship between video and voice (conversation period) and an execution period of a voice recognition processing.

FIG. 6 is a view for showing transmission of data from the videophone device 14 to the videophone device 12 in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a flowchart for explaining the operation of the videophone device 14 on the transmitting side in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a flowchart for explaining the operation of the videophone device 12 on the receiving side in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 9 is a view for use in explaining a function of the videophone device 12 on the transmitting side and the videophone device 14 on the receiving side in the embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 10 is a view for showing a procedure sequence required until communication between the videophone device 12 and videophone device 14 (IP phone device) is achieved.

FIG. 11 is an example of information written in a function profile 42a in the embodiment of the present

invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

An embodiment of the present invention will be explained with reference to the accompanying drawings.

5 FIG. 1 is a block diagram of the structure of a video phone system according to the embodiment of the present invention.

 In the video phone system, videophone devices 12 and 14 are connected together via a network 10.

10 The videophone devices 12 and 14 are implemented with computers which read a program recorded in a recording medium such as a CD-ROM, a DVD or a magnetic disk, and is controlled in operation by the program. To be more specific, they are each implemented with a personal

15 computer, a PDC (personal digital assistant), a mobile phone provided with a camera or a specific videophone device. The network 10 is an IP network including Internet, in which data is transmitted/received by using a protocol such as a TIP (transmission control

20 protocol)/IP (internet protocol). The videophone devices 12 and 14 each have a communication function according to the IP (internet protocol).

 FIG. 2 is a block diagram of each of the videophone devices 12 and 14 according to the

25 embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 2, each of the videophone devices 12 and 14 comprises a voice output unit 20, a voice input unit

22, a voice processing unit 24, a voice synthesizing unit 26, a voice recognizing unit 27, an image output unit 28, an image input unit 30, an image processing unit 32, a text data input unit 34, a multiplexing/
5 dividing unit 36, a communication unit 38, a function controlling unit 40, a function instructing unit 42, a storage unit 44 and a recording/reproducing controlling unit 46.

The voice output unit 20 outputs voice based on
10 voice data output from the voice processing unit 24, and includes a speaker, etc. The voice input unit 22 inputs voice, and then outputs voice data to the voice processing unit 24 and the voice recognizing unit 27. The voice input unit 22 includes a microphone, etc.
15 The voice output unit 20 and the voice input unit 22 may be independently provided in the videophone device, or may be formed as a single unit such as a handset or a single-unit headset.

The voice processing unit 24 performs decode
20 processing on encoded voice data from the multiplexing/dividing unit 36, and also encode processing on voice data input from the voice input unit 22. Further, the voice processing unit 24 performs processing for causing voice data, which is generated by the voice
25 synthesizing unit 26 based on the text data, to be output from the voice output unit 20.

The voice synthesizing unit 26 carries out voice

synthesis on the basis of text data obtained by dividing of the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 to obtain synthetic voice, and outputs voice data of the synthetic voice to the voice processing unit 24.

5 The voice recognizing unit 27 performs voice recognition processing on the voice data input from the voice input unit 22, generates text data based on, e.g., voice, and outputs the text data to the multiplexing/dividing unit 36.

10 The image output unit 28 outputs an image based on image data output from the image processing unit 32, and includes a display unit such as a liquid crystal display or a CRT. The image input unit 30 performs an image pickup operation, and outputs image data to the
15 image processing unit 32. Also, the image input unit 30 includes an image pickup device such as a camera.

 The image processing unit 32 performs decode processing on encoded image data from the multiplexing/dividing unit 36, and code processing on image data
20 input from the image output unit 28.

 The text data input unit 34 generates text data based on the data input by an input device such as a keyboard, a tablet or a mouse, by using a program such as an IME (Input Method Editor).

25 The multiplexing/dividing unit 36 multiplexes data input from the voice processing unit 24 (voice data), the image processing unit 32 (image data), and the

voice recognizing unit 27 or the text input unit (text data), and generates data in a data format in which data can be transmitted to a network 10 through the communication unit 38, e.g., multiplex stream data in which each of a number of data is packeted. Also, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 divides the data received through the communication unit 38 into voice data, image data and text data, and outputs the voice data, the image data and the text data to the voice processing unit 24, the image processing unit 32 and the voice synthesizing unit 26, respectively. Furthermore, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 executes multiplexing/dividing processing using, e.g., a MPEG (Moving Picture Experts Group) technique. In addition, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 includes an adjusting unit 36a for adjusting the timing at which a videophone device of a party of the other end of a communication link displays a text based on text data, in accordance with data sent to the videophone device, i.e., adjusting generation of multiplex stream data such that reproduction of an image and voice is synchronized with displaying of the text. The adjusting unit 36a carries out adjustment such that the text is displayed by the device (videophone device) of the party of the other end based on the text data for a period time which is longer than the time period for which voice is input by the voice input unit 22.

The communication unit 38 controls data transmission/reception of, e.g., an TCP/IP.

5 The function control unit 40 controls multiplexing/dividing processing of the multiplexing/
dividing unit 36 in accordance with the data receiving
function of the videophone device of the part of the
other end, i.e., in accordance with whether the
processing function of the videophone device of the
party of the other end is applied to image data, voice
10 data or text data, and causes only data, which can be
processed by the videophone device of the party of
the other end, to be transmitted thereto. Before
communication with the videophone device of the party
of the other end, the function control unit 40 acquires
15 a function profile, in which information indicating
a processing function is written, from the videophone
device of the party of the other end through the
communication unit 38, and controls the multiplexing/
dividing unit 36 in accordance with the contents of the
20 function profile.

 The function instructing unit 42 provides the
function profile 42a, which is to be transmitted before
communication with the videophone device of the party
of the other end, to the function control unit 40.
25 The information to be written in the function profile
42a may be fixedly determined in accordance with
the function of the videophone device, or may be

arbitrarily determined to indicate a function which is not used, in accordance with a user's instruction given from an input device not shown.

5 The storage unit 44 stores data input to the
multiplexing/dividing unit 36 through the communication
unit 38. For example, in order to achieve an answer
phone function, the storage unit 44 stores received
data, e.g., image data, voice data and text data which
are transmitted from the videophone device of the party
10 of the other end. The storage unit 44 provides the
stored received data to the recording/reproducing
control unit 46, when an instruction for executing
reproduction is given.

15 The recording/reproducing control unit 46 performs
a control for causing the videophone device to function
as an answer phone. When an answer-phone recording
mode is set, the recording/reproducing control unit
46 causes data, which is received through the
multiplexing/dividing unit 36, to be stored in the
20 storage unit 44. Also, by giving an instruction for
executing reproduction, the recording/reproducing
control unit 46 causes the received data stored in the
storage unit 44 to be provided to the multiplexing/
dividing unit 36, and also causes an image (including
25 a text) and voice to be output.

(The first embodiment)

The following case will be referred to: the

videophone device 12 on the transmitting side adds text data to image data and voice data, and then transmits those data to the videophone device 14 on the receiving side, and the videophone device 14 displays a character string based on the text data.

FIG. 3 shows a state in which for example, the videophone devices 12 and 14 are connected through the network 10, and data is transmitted from the videophone device 12 to the videophone device 14. FIG. 4 is a flowchart for use in explaining the operation of the videophone device on the transmitting side. Suppose that in the state in FIG. 3, the videophone device 14 on the receiving side is used by a deaf person, and also that the videophone device 12 is set to perform a function of adding text data to image data and voice data, and transmitting the data, and the videophone device 14 is set to perform a function of displaying a character string as a caption based on the text data contained in the received data.

First of all, in the videophone device 12, voice is input by the voice input unit 22 while an image of, e.g., a user's face is being picked up (Step A1). Image data input by the image input unit 30 is encoded by the video processing unit 32, and output to the multiplexing/dividing unit 36. Also, the voice data input from the voice input unit 22 is encoded by the voice processing unit 24, and output to the

multiplexing/dividing unit 36.

On the other hand, the voice recognizing unit 27 inputs thereinto the voice data output from the voice input unit 22, and performs voice recognition processing on the voice data. For example, if the user says "How do you do?", voice recognition processing is carried out to generate text data with respect to "How do you do?" (Step A2).

FIG. 5 shows a relationship between an image (a1) input by the image input unit 30, voice input by the voice input unit 22 (a talking time period) (a2), and an execution time period (a3) of the voice recognition processing. The voice recognizing unit 27 immediately executes voice recognition processing on voice input when the user talks with the videophone device, and outputs text data expressing the content of the user's speech substantially at the same time as the user stops talking.

The multiplexing/dividing unit 36 multiplexes voice data input from the voice processing unit 24, the image data input from the image processing unit 32, and text data from the voice recognizing unit 27. At this time, the adjusting unit 36a adjusts the output timing of the text associated with the image and voice. To be more specific, as shown in FIG. 5, the adjusting unit 36a carries out adjustment such that a text displaying time period b2 for which the text is displayed is

longer than a talking time period a2 for which the user talks, and which is confirmed by checking the image and voice. This is because in general, it takes longer time to read characters displayed on the videophone device to know the content of the user's speech, than to hear voice output from the videophone device.

The multiplexing/dividing unit 36 generates multiplex stream data which is adjusted with respect to the output timing of the text associated with the image and voice, and transmits the multiplex stream data to the videophone device 14 of the party of the other end through the communication unit 38 (Step A4). It should be noted that the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 may be designed to generate multiplex stream data by synthesizing text data with image data and voice data at the adjusted output timing, and may be designed to generate relevant information indicating a relationship in time between the text and the image and voice, and transmit the relevant information along with the multiplex stream data.

Also, the above explanation is given with respect to the case where the text data is generated by the voice recognition processing. However, the text data may be input by the text data input unit 34 (e.g., a keyboard). In this case, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 does not adjust the output timing of the text data, since the timing of data inputting using the text

data input unit 34 does not coincide with the timing at which the user talks (in addition, there is a case where the user does not talk). When text data is input from the text data input unit 34, the multiplexing/
5 dividing unit 36 synthesizes the text data with the image data and voice data input along with the text data to obtain synthetic data, and transmits the synthetic data to the videophone device 14.

Next, when the videophone device 14 on the
10 receiving side receives data from the videophone device 12 through the communication unit 38, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 divides the received data into image data, voice data and text data.

The image processing unit 32 synthesizes the text
15 data with the image data obtained by dividing of the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 to obtain synthetic data, and causes the synthetic data to be output by the image output unit 28. To be more specific, the content of the speech of the user of the videophone device 12,
20 i.e., the party of the other end, is displayed. For example, a character string "How do you do?" is displayed on a screen as a caption as shown in FIG. 3. On the other hand, the voice processing unit 24 causes voice to be output from the voice output unit 20 on the
25 basis of the voice data obtained by dividing of the multiplexing/dividing unit 36.

In such a manner, the voice input at the

videophone device 12 on the transmitting side is converted into text data, and then the text data is displayed as a caption on the screen at the videophone device 14 on the receiving side. Accordingly, even if
5 the voice output at the videophone device 14 is not useful (for example, the videophone device 14 is used by a deaf person), communication can be achieved between the transmitting side and the receiving side. In addition, the character string is displayed on the
10 screen for a longer time period than that for which the party of the other end speaks, as a result of which the contents of the speech can be reliably grasped.

Also, when a text is input by a keyboard or the like at the videophone device 12 on the receiving side
15 without inputting voice, it can also be displayed as a caption on the screen at the videophone device 14 on the receiving side. Thus, even if voice inputting cannot be applied to the videophone devices 12 and 14, communication can be achieved therebetween.

20 The above explanation is given by referring to the case where the videophone device 12 on the transmitting side executes voice recognition processing, and transmits the text data along with the image and voice data, and the videophone device 14 on the receiving
25 side synthesizes the text data with the image data. However, the videophone device 14 may carry out the voice recognition processing. In this case, the

videophone device 12 transmits the input image data and voice data to the videophone device 14. At the videophone device 14, the voice processing unit 24 decodes the voice data obtained by dividing of the
5 multiplexing/dividing unit 36, and the voice recognizing unit 27 performs voice recognition processing on the decoded voice data. The text data generated by the voice recognition processing of the voice recognizing unit 27 is output to the image
10 processing unit 32. The image processing unit 32 adds text data to the image data and causes the image data including the text data to be displayed by the image output unit 28.

In such a manner, with respect to the image data and voice data transmitted from a transmitting terminal
15 of the videophone device 12, the videophone device 14 recognizes voice in real time, and displays a character or character string as a caption on the screen. Accordingly, even if voice outputting is not useful for
20 the receiving side using the videophone device 14, e.g., the videophone device 14 is used by a deaf person, the user of the videophone device 12 does not need to take such a fact into consideration.

Next, the following explanation is given with
25 respect to the case wherein the videophone device 14 adds text data to image data, and then transmits these data, and the videophone device 12 perform voice

synthesis on the basis of the text data.

FIG. 6 shows a case where for example, the videophone device 12 and the videophone device 14 are connected through the network 10, and data is transmitted from the videophone device 14 to the videophone device 12. In this case (FIG. 6), suppose the videophone device 14 on the transmitting side is used by a deaf person. FIG. 7 is a flowchart for explaining the operation of the videophone device 14 on the transmitting side. FIG. 8 is a flowchart for explaining the operation of the videophone device 12 on the receiving side.

Suppose the videophone device 14 is set to perform a function of adding text data to image data, and transmitting these data, and the videophone device 12 is set to perform a function of executing voice synthesis based on the text data contained in the data transmitted from the videophone device 14.

At the videophone device 14, voice is input by the voice input unit 22 while an image of, e.g., a user's face is picked up by the image input unit 30 (Step B1). Image data input by the image input unit 30 is encoded by the image processing unit 32, and then output to the multiplexing/dividing unit 36. Also, voice data input by the voice input unit 22 is encoded by the voice processing unit 24, and then output to the multiplexing/dividing unit 36. In this case, suppose

that the user of the videophone device does not speak.

At the videophone device 14, when the text data is input by the text data input unit 34 (employing a keyboard or the like) (Step B2), the text data is
5 output to the multiplexing/dividing unit 36.

When the text data is input by the text data input unit 34, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 synthesizes voice data, which is input from the voice processing unit 24 at that time, with voice data which is input
10 from the voice recognizing unit 27 at that time, to thereby obtain synthetic voice, and then transmits the synthetic voice to the videophone device 12 (Step B3). If text data is not input, the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 transmits only image data and voice data to the
15 videophone device 12 (Step B4).

Next, when the videophone device 12 on receiving side receives the data which is transmitted from the videophone device 14 through the communication unit 38, it divides the received data into image data, voice
20 data and text data by means of the multiplexing/dividing 36 (Step C1).

The voice synthesizing unit 26 performs voice synthesis based on the text data obtained by dividing of the multiplexing/dividing unit 36, and outputs voice
25 data obtained by the voice synthesis to the voice processing unit 24 (Step C2).

The voice processing unit 24 causes voice to be

output from the voice output unit 20 on the basis
of the voice data obtained by the voice synthesis.
Also, the image processing unit 32 causes an image
to be output by the image output unit 28 on the
5 basis of the image data obtained by dividing of the
multiplexing/dividing unit 36 (Step C3).

In the above manner, even if the videophone device
14 on the transmitting side does not input voice
thereinto, when it inputs a text by using the text data
input unit 34 employing a keyboard or the like, the
10 videophone device 12 on the receiving side can vocally
output data transmitted from the videophone device 14,
since it can perform voice synthesis on the data.
Thus, the videophone device enables the user to
15 communicate as if in ordinary conversation. In
addition, if it is not useful that the text is output
(e.g., if the user is blind), conversation using voice
can be achieved between the transmitting and receiving
sides.

20 Furthermore, the videophone device 14 on the
receiving side can be set to serve as answer phone
in accordance with an instruction given by the user.
When the videophone device 14 on the receiving side
serves as an answer phone, it causes data transmitted
25 through the communication unit 38 to be stored in
the storage unit 44 by a control of the recording/
reproducing controlling unit 46. In this case,

the multiplexing/dividing unit 36 does not execute processing on the data transmitted through the communication unit 38. That is, the videophone device 14 does not output voice, an image or a text.

5 On the other hand, when data is stored in the storage unit 44, and then when an instruction for executing data reproduction is given by the user, the recording/reproducing controlling unit 46 provides the data stored in the storage unit 44 to the multiplexing/
10 dividing unit 36. The multiplexing/dividing unit 36, as mentioned above, divides the data stored in the storage unit 44 into image data, voice data and text data. Thereby, voice and an image including a text can be output, or an image and voice generated by voice
15 synthesis based on the text data can be output.

(The second embodiment)

In the second embodiment, only data which can be handled by the function of the device on the receiving side can be transmitted from the transmitting side to
20 the receiving side.

For example, as shown in FIG. 9, the videophone device 12 has a function of handling any of image data, text data and voice data. The videophone device 12 transmit a function profile containing information
25 indicating the function of the videophone devices 12 to the videophone device 14. If the videophone device 14 (e.g., an IP phone device) can display only a text, a

function profile containing information indicating the function of the videophone devices 14 is transmitted to the videophone device 12 before communication is carried out between the videophone device 12 and 14, as a result of which the videophone device 14 can recognize the data format of data which can be transmitted by both the videophone devices 12 and 14.

FIG. 10 shows a procedure sequence of operations carried out until communication is achieved between the videophone devices 12 and the videophone device 14 (IP phone device). To be more specific, the videophone devices 12 and 14 exchange function profiles 42a with each other, after executing a sequence of operations to connect with each other through the network 10.

For example, the videophone device 12 transmits the function profile 42a to the videophone device 14 through the function controlling unit 40 and the communication unit 38 ((1) in FIG. 10). In the same manner, the videophone device 14 transmits the function profile 42a to the videophone device 12 ((2) in FIG. 10).

FIG. 11 shows an example of information written in the function profile 42a. In the example of FIG. 11, information is written which indicates that IMAGE is in the OFF state (which means that a function of handling image data is not provided), and VOICE and TEXT are in the ON state (which means that functions of handing

voice data and text data are provided).

At the videophone device 12, the function
controlling unit 40 limits the data to be subjected to
synthesis of the multiplexing/dividing unit 36, in
5 accordance with the information written in the function
profile 42a transmitted from the videophone device 14,
thereby controlling the data to be transmitted to the
videophone device 14 ((4) in FIG. 10). In this case,
the function controlling unit 40 sets the function of
10 the videophone device 12 such that the videophone
device 14 can transmit text data only.

Similarly, the function of the videophone device
14 is set to limit the data to be transmitted to the
videophone device 12, in accordance with the function
15 profile 42a transmitted from the videophone device 12
((3) in FIG. 10).

In this example, the videophone device 14 on the
receiving side has only a function of handling a text,
and thus the videophone device 12 on the transmitting
20 side transmits only text data in accordance with the
specification of the videophone device 14. Needless to
say, the videophone device 14 also transmits only text
data. In such a manner, even if the videophone devices
on the transmitting side and receiving side have
25 different functions, they can communicate with each
other.

The information written in the videophone devices

12 and 14 may be freely set in accordance with the user's instruction. To be more specific, with respect to each data shown in FIG. 11, the ON/OFF state may be freely determined in accordance with an instruction
5 given by the user.

More specifically, even if the videophone device 12 is set to perform a function of handling all an image, voice and a text, and then if it is not necessary to transmit image data, the function profile
10 42a is set to indicate "OFF" with respect to image. Thereby, the videophone device 14 on the receiving side can be informed by the function profile 42a that the function of handling image in the videophone device 12 is in the OFF state, as a result of which the
15 videophone device 14 is prevented from receiving text data.

In such a manner, the function of the videophone device can be set by the user. Accordingly, for example, even if the limit to which the network 10 can
20 handle information communication is small, videophone devices can flexibly communicate with each other in accordance with the above limit, by limiting the data to be handled to, e.g., text data and voice data.

Additional advantages and modifications will
25 readily occur to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details and representative embodiments

shown and described herein. Accordingly, various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the general inventive concept as defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.